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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD (PARTIAL)* OF THE 592nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 12 January 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. OUEDRAOGO

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting (closed).

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GE.00-40280 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER UNITED NATIONS BODIES, SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER COMPETENT BODIES (agenda item 7)

1. Ms. MALUWA (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS) said that more than half of all people infected with human immunodeficiency virus had acquired the HIV virus before the age of 25, as was not surprising given that poverty, lack of skills, violence and harmful social norms were the main vectors of the AIDS epidemic, on a par with violations and deprivation of human rights.

2. More than three million children and young people under 25 had become infected with HIV in 1999. It was estimated that since the beginning of the epidemic 11.2 million children had been orphaned by AIDS. Those figures revealed to what extent children and young people continued to be affected, directly or indirectly, by an illness the impact of which was constantly increasing. They were at risk of infection from their earliest age by transmission from a seropositive mother, particularly in countries where pregnant women had no access to the new treatments. Young people could become infected directly because they lacked sufficient information about risks and how to protect themselves. The ever-increasing number of orphans often lived in communities which did not have the resources to cover their basic requirements and had to leave school in order to earn a living for their brothers and sisters. All kinds of economic, social and cultural factors made children more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. The situation was exacerbated in the case of refugee children, or children living in extreme poverty or in the street, child soldiers and children in armed conflict zones or children involved in prostitution.

3. For those reasons, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) was continuing to give special attention to children in the response to the AIDS epidemic. For three years its had been conducting a vast awareness campaign, which also focused on the designing and implementing of policies and programmes targeted at children which featured their rights and called for their participation. The campaign also aimed at giving young people their say, and getting them to engage in dialogue with each other and with adults so that children infected with HIV/AIDS could be free from all discrimination. The outcome had been that many Governments and representatives of the public and private sectors had committed themselves to promoting children and young people's rights to information, education, recreation, safe spaces and employment. At the international level a number of organizations had included an HIV/AIDS component in their human rights activities.

4. UNAIDS had, in collaboration with the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights, developed a publication entitled "Human Rights and the Prevention and Care of HIV/AIDS in Children and Young People", to be published shortly, which contained the recommendations adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child following its meeting on children's rights and HIV/AIDS. UNAIDS, in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, had appointed a Human Rights and HIV/AIDS Officer who would work directly with the treaty bodies. The UNAIDS Secretariat had also decided to help the Committee on the Rights of the Child directly by transmitting to it relevant information and analysing reports submitted by States Parties in order to identify gaps and points requiring

clarification. It had developed a reference handbook with the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center. It had continued to strengthen collaboration with the other sponsors of the Programme (UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNDCP and the World Bank) in areas concerning the rights of the child.

5. Mr. ROSELAERS (International Labour Office) pointed out that the International Labour Organization's standards regarding child labour complemented the Convention on the Rights of the Child and hoped that the Committee and the International Labour Office (ILO) could continue their fruitful cooperation. In particular, he thanked the Committee for recommending that the States Parties should ratify ILO Convention No. 138 and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182). ILO for its part would transmit to the Committee all necessary information concerning activities under the International Programme on Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). Joint activities could be organized in the context of that collaboration.

6. During the past two years, the volume of IPEC's operations had expanded, as had the number of participating countries and the size of donor contributions. It had diversified its forms of cooperation and had gone on to adopt several approaches in its activity aimed not only at taking children out of work but also at educating them and helping their parents to find other sources of income. In addition, landmark events in 1999 had included the Global March Against Child Labour, the adoption of Convention No. 182 and increased momentum in ratification of ILO core standards. The Director-General of the International Labour Office had decided to restructure children's activities at Headquarters and in the field, by combining the introduction of standards, supervision, law, research and consciousness-raising in a single programme and to allocate additional resources to IPEC on top of donor contributions. Steps had also been taken to improve the quality and efficiency of programmes.

7. IPEC's main objective was the universal ratification of Convention No. 182 (half of ILO membership by the end of 2001). To date, only six countries had ratified it, namely, Botswana, Ireland, Malawi, Seychelles, Slovakia and the United States of America. At the same time it would make efforts to increase the number of ratifications of the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and to improve the quality of the programmes, generously financed by a wide spread of donors. IPEC would endeavour to cooperate more closely with other ILO services and programmes and with United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank, UNESCO, UNFPA, WHO, UNAIDS and WFP. It would also collaborate with employers' and workers' organizations and with coalitions of non-governmental organizations. It was with the assistance of all its partners that it would be able to eradicate the worst forms of child labour and obtain tangible results for children.

8. Ms. WOLL (Save the Children) introduced the Convention on the Rights of the Child Impact Study, which had been prepared in 1997 for the tenth anniversary of the Convention. It concerned six countries: Ghana, Yemen, Peru, Nicaragua, the Philippines and Sweden. Its objective was to identify the specific impact of the Convention on Governments, NGOs and other components of civil society, in other words to ascertain whether their activities had evolved since the adoption of the Convention. The authors had based the study on countries situated in different parts of the world, whose religions and cultures were also different, and had taken care to include a developed country since what was at stake was not to make an example of the poor countries but to advance children's rights everywhere in the world. While for reasons of

convenience the study had been carried out by the branches of Save the Children in the United Kingdom and Sweden, it did not only represent the viewpoint of that organization but of all the associations for the defence of children's rights in the countries considered. The relevant data had been collected directly on the spot by consultants. Unfortunately, it had not always been possible to trace the activities undertaken to implement the Convention, since very little written material existed and that had been the main obstacle to carrying out the study.

9. The main conclusions were: overall, the Convention was little known or understood and it was not clear what children's rights encompassed. It was also apparent that both Governments and NGOs had failed to initiate activities to promote the Convention. Naturally, the political context in each country was a contributory factor, particularly when human rights violations were rife or when a country was emerging from civil war. Generally speaking, countries were reluctant to admit children as participants in society with their own rights.

10. One of the main obstacles that the ratification of the Convention had not been able to remove to any great extent was the inadequate participation of children in society. Children's congresses or parliaments were still few and far between. There was a need for in-depth reflection on what such participation could and should be.

11. Furthermore, although four of the six countries studied had, after ratifying the Convention, undertaken the reform of their legislation and established a central body responsible for children's issues or an ombudsman-type structure, dialogue with the Committee had remained remote from the public scene. The Committee's reports and concluding observations had too limited a distribution in the public service and vis-à-vis the authorities both in capital cities and - as was even more obviously to the point - locally.

12. Just as worrying was the lack of locally mobilized resources when it was at that level that the majority of initiatives on behalf of children were conducted.

13. One of the positive conclusions of the study was that the NGOs had taken the Convention on the Rights of the Child very seriously. It could even be said that the ratification of the Convention had led to much greater awareness within NGOs than within Governments, although that was not necessarily an advantage since NGOs carried far less weight than Governments in terms of ensuring the follow-up of the implementation of the Convention or influencing decision-makers and law-givers.

14. A closer link was needed with other members of civil society - religious organizations, university institutions or professional groups; if they were more aware they would be able, in association with the NGOs, to bring pressure to bear in public debate so that the situation in the field would progress.

15. More substantial support should be sought from the international community - intergovernmental organizations, financial institutions and donor countries. Although the rights of the child might be perceived rather differently from one country to another, all countries nevertheless claimed to be interested in helping to implement the Convention, whether in the form of finance or of technical assistance. Sweden had recently set an example by considerably increasing its aid contribution in that area.

16. Mr. FULCI, noting that the document distributed by the International Labour Office called on parliamentarians to speed up the ratification process, pointed out that the only means of influencing the decision-makers, in his opinion, was to send experts to each country's capital to meet them personally and encourage awareness of their responsibilities.

17. Mrs. KARP congratulated Save the Children on its study but was concerned by the results it presented and wondered whether any positive conclusions at all could be drawn from it.

18. Ms. WOLL (Save the Children) thought that three of the conclusions of the study were positive. Firstly, the six countries concerned had made efforts to implement the Convention, although five of them were poor countries; secondly, it emerged that UNICEF had been able to assume a genuine leadership role, contrary to what might have been feared in 1996 when the study was initiated, showing that it had reacted positively; thirdly, the NGOs, isolated in their work though they were, had very actively committed themselves to implementing the Convention.

19. Ms. MILLER (UNICEF) drew Committee members' attention to UNICEF's annual report, to the new version of its information kit on children's rights and to the General Assembly resolution concerning the special session which would be held in 2001; she mentioned the participation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in the preparatory work for the special session and drew attention to the draft programme of work of the first preparatory meeting.

20. Mr. STAHLHOFER (WHO) said that two WHO documents of interest to the Committee in the process of finalization would be transmitted to the Committee at its next session, namely, a guide to the drafting of reports to be used by WHO staff and an information kit on children's right to health.

21. A training course on children's rights activities developed by WHO staff was currently enjoying major success at WHO Headquarters and in the near future similar courses would take place in at least three regional offices.

22. WHO officials would soon be travelling to India and Bhutan to study means of how best to implement the recommendations the Committee had addressed to those countries. In its concern to strengthen collaboration with the Committee, WHO would also continue to search out partners among its field staff who could collect national data and help Governments to prepare reports for the Committee.

23. WHO further intended to collaborate with ILO on the repercussions of work on children's health and had already incorporated the issue in its programme of work.

24. Ms. COHEN (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) informed the Committee that she could make available the Special Representative's recent report to the General Assembly on his activities in the last few years and the report on his mission to Sierra Leone in September 1999. She also drew the Committee's attention to resolution 1261 adopted by the Security Council in August 1999, which reflected its concerns regarding the repercussions of armed conflict on children. She stressed that the

resolution urged both States and peacekeeping forces to take children's rights into account and requested the Secretary-General to ensure that peacekeeping forces received training on the rights of children.

25. In the resolution, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Council by 31 July 2000 a report on its implementation, consulting all relevant parts of the United Nations system and taking into account other relevant work. Comments by the Committee would be welcome.

26. The Office had taken active steps to incorporate children's rights in the terms of reference of its peacekeeping operations, particularly in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in collaboration with UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had ensured that the personnel responsible for the operations included senior level advisers on children's issues.

27. Mr. DOEK asked about the coverage of the Security Council's current activities concerning the AIDS epidemic in Africa. He also requested written information on the changes to the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). He wished to know what steps IPEC was taking, in countries in which its activities were reaching their conclusion, to ensure the sustainability of the actions undertaken and whether such actions were subsequently the model for other projects. In India, for example, the IPEC project concerned only 80,000 children and it would be desirable to expand it.

28. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked the representative of ILO whether, in order to optimize cooperation with the Committee, information transmitted to it by IPEC concerning countries whose reports were pending consideration could be more specific, particularly with regard to the state of progress of IPEC projects in the countries in question.

29. She would also like to know in which countries the rights of children were an integral part of peacekeeping programmes, since she considered it to be a very constructive development. She noted with interest the study sponsored by Save the Children and invited the latter to continue its work; in that regard she would like further details about criteria governing the selection of the six countries used in the study.

30. Mr. FLEET (UNAIDS) said that at a recent meeting on the problem of AIDS in Africa, the Security Council had for the first time seen a threat to the safety of mankind in a health problem. In their statements, the Secretary-General, the Vice-President of the United States, the President of the World Bank and the Administrator of UNDP had put emphasis on the distressed situation of children and orphans in Africa and the need to come to their rescue. During the meeting many speakers had welcomed the announcement by the United States Government of additional financing for Africa (bringing total financing to 335 million dollars) and had paid tribute to UNAIDS and the International Partnership against AIDS in Africa for their action. UNAIDS would keep the Security Council informed of developments in the situation in Africa, since the Council had expressed its intention of coming back to the question.

31. Mr. ROSELAERS (ILO) said that the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention would come into force on 19 November 2000.

32. A summary of the changes which had taken place in IPEC's structure would be sent to the Committee.

33. Where the continuation of IPEC's activities in India was concerned, stress would be placed on eliminating the worst forms of child labour in the various States and at the federal level. Given the extent of the phenomenon of child labour in India - 40 to 50 million children could be involved - IPEC did not intend to do more than carry out pilot studies. It could probably expand its action, however, and ensure some degree of sustainability in its activities by adopting a global approach, based on child education, the creation of income-generating activities for parents and general consciousness-raising by means of large-scale campaigns.

34. There was no regular cooperation between IPEC and UNESCO on educating children who had formerly worked but IPEC for its part was supervising the integration of young children in a school environment and the provision of vocational training for older children.

35. The desire for still better cooperation between IPEC and the Committee would be taken into due consideration.

36. Ms. WOLL (Save the Children) said that in the context of the study she had carried out her organization had endeavoured to select countries that were representative of different geographical, cultural and economic situations. Since the idea had also been to ensure interaction and follow-up, each country had had the opportunity to submit a report and had been the subject of conclusions and recommendations. As things stood there were no plans to continue the study.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 5.10 p.m.